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IMMIGRATION & MIGRATION

Gender performance and migration experience of Filipino transgender women entertainers in Japan

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ABSTRACT

Background: Many unrepresented stories of Filipino transgender migrant workers in Japan are significant in Filipino trans women's struggle for visibility.

Aim: This study aims to explore how migration and gender performance influence the gender affirmation of Filipino trans women or *transpinay* entertainers in Japan.

Method: This study draws on a qualitative approach using grounded theory to collect data between 2012 and 2018 through participant observations and semi-structured interviews in Manila, Cebu, and Japan. Through snowball sampling and ties with the LGBTQ community, 14 participants shared their narratives that revolved around their background, gender identity, visa and job application process, entertainment work, and relationships before, during, and after migration.

Results: The transpinays' migration experience is influential in their gender affirmation as in Japan and upon their return to the Philippines. The transpinay entertainers migrate to Japan is not solely for economic reasons; they also seek sexual emancipation. Before moving to Japan, they negotiate their gender identity to pass the auditions and apply for an entertainer visa. During their migration, doing and undoing gender is woven into their lives with their intersecting subordinate identities as a Filipino transgender woman and a migrant worker, resulting into an intersectional invisibility. Their entertainer profile as a Filipino transgender woman is an embodiment of gendered performances and ethnicity. Transpinay entertainers returned several times or chose to stay in Japan because they were marginalized in their home country.

Conclusion: The transpinay entertainers provide a significant case for highlighting the temporal aspect of their gender performance and migration experience, in which their commitment toward entertainment work transforms over time. The migration experience in Japan indicates a positive outcome in their gender affirmation that does not necessarily lead to gender confirmation surgery.

KEYWORDS

Entertainers in Japan; Filipino transgender women; gender performance; intersectionality; migration; transpinay

Introduction

The recognition of transgender women in the Philippines took an exceptionally long time to happen. Their struggles and aspirations are depicted in films. The story of "Die Beautiful" (Lana et al., 2016) revolves around the bittersweet transition of Trisha who joins numerous beauty pageants and suddenly dies upon winning. Her best friend and the camaraderie of trans women use humor to cope with tragedy and fulfill Trisha's wish to die beautiful. Another example is the documentary film, "Paper Dolls" (Heymann et al., 2006), that follows the lives of Filipino gay men who work as full-time caregivers and perform as cross-dressers in Tel Aviv night clubs. In the political scene, Geraldine Roman made history in September 2016 as the first transgender politician elected in the Philippines and passed the Anti-Discrimination Bill on the Basis of Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity. There is another important group of transgender women whose untold stories can become part of the discourse. Kaori, a transgender beauty pageant winner and activist, had affirmed her gender during her stint as an entertainer in Japan. Kaori's labor migration in Japan is one of the many stories of unrepresented Filipino transgender migrant workers who also matter in Filipino trans women's struggle for visibility.

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This article explores how labor migration and gender performance influence the gender affirmation of Filipino trans women or *transpinay* entertainers in Japan. Using intersectionality to analyze their narratives, I argue that the transpinays' migration experience is influential in their gender affirmation as in Japan and upon their return to the Philippines. I begin by briefly discussing relevant literature on queer migration, Filipino labor migration, and intersectionality to elucidate how my findings can fill in the gaps of previous studies. After I explain the methodology, I trace and examine the life course of transpinay entertainers during their pre-migration, migration in Japan, and return migration. The conclusion reemphasizes the significance of migration experience and gender performance in the gender affirmation of transpinay.

Queer migration

The transformation of sexualities and sense of belonging are two salient themes in queer migration studies. Queer migration scholarship often engages in understanding how sexuality is constructed within intersecting relations of power (including race, ethnicity, gender, and class) and how LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) migrants negotiate these regimes of power (Luibhéid, 2008). Sexual migration (Carrillo, 2004) is defined as "international relocation that is motivated, directly or indirectly, by the sexuality of those who migrate" (p. 58). This framework excludes economic aspirations or familial reasons as primary motives for migration. Instead, it posits that sexuality itself, encompassing sexual desires or gender identity transformation, is a fundamental driver in transnational movement. Carrillo further argues that sexual migration discourses should explore how cultural ideologies influence the formation of sexualities of people who travel as well as relocate for sexuality-related reasons. This is apparent in Cantú's (2009) analysis of the history of Mexican immigration, which examines the experiences of Mexican gay men to understand the flow of gay asylum seekers and gay American tourists to Mexico. Meanwhile, Camminga (2017) notes that South Africa is the only country in Africa that constitutionally protects transgender people; however, challenges the appeal of transgender migrants who do not have legitimate papers. These studies present how ubiquitous the authority of immigration is over LGBTQ migrants' legal status.

On the other hand, the following scholarly works delve into how the intersectionality of non-heteronormative migrants affects their sense of belonging and desires. For example, the intersections of gender and social class of Filipino gay community's diasporic experiences in New York influence their negotiation of sexual identities in the gay globality, which provides a comparative cultural understanding between Asian and Western sexual and gender ideologies (Manalansan, 2003). Meanwhile, exclusionary moments are the main theme of a study on lesbian, gay, pansexual, and queer (LGPQ) migrants from Central and Eastern Europe, which investigates how they find a sense of (un) belonging to remote Iceland (Sólveigar-Guðmundsdóttir, 2018). Creating spaces that align with sexual and gender practices is crucial in queer migration. Ni-chome, a gay district in Shinjuku, Tokyo, serves as a space for racialized desires of Chinese and South Korean men as ethnosexual invaders in the Japanese gay subculture (Baudinette, 2016). Through homonormative mobility, gay expatriates in Manila create transnational spaces as an escape from heteronormativity at home country and an act of homo-orientalist desire of Filipino men (Collins, 2009). The motives for migration indicated in these scholarly works are sexual desires, legal acceptance, and a lifestyle in line with their sexual orientation. Although this body of scholarship is on non-heteronormativity in migration, limited academic attention particularly to transgender migration in Asia makes this research on transpinay significant.

Filipino labor migration

Most previous works on Filipino migration and labor focus on the heteronormativity, particularly the cisgender women in the global care industry (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2004; Parreñas, 2001) and the entertainment industry in Japan (Parreñas, 2010, 2011; Suzuki, 2011; Tyner, 2013) are presumed to be oppressed or exploited. As gender is relational, scholarship should create a

more expansive body of literature that engages in the discourse on migrants' sexualities, bodies, and desires (Manalansan, 2006). While scholarship on Filipino global migration is feminized, Fajardo (2008) takes on a queer, immigrant, transgender, and transnational Filipino-American perspective as he collects the narratives of Filipino seamen who produce and coproduce Filipino masculinities situated in male heterosexuality and transgender tomboyness in the Philippine context. Discussions on Filipino labor and migration describe the conditions of heteronormativity, cisnormativity, women, gay men, and tomboys. However, Filipino transgender women as labor migrants have been overlooked. Hence, examining the case of Japan can help situate the migration experiences of neglected Filipino transgender women in the wider topic of transgender labor migrants.

Cisgender women entertainers in Japan have dominated the narratives of labor migration in the country (Ballescas, 1992; Faier, 2007; Parreñas, 2011; Suzuki, 2011; Tyner, 2013). Japan's bubble economy paved the way for Filipinos to work in an *omise* (a Japanese pub similar to a gentleman's club that includes shows, sing-alongs, and hostesses). Filipinos constituted the largest number of foreign entertainers in Japan that gradually increased in the late 1970s, and with more than 82,741 Filipino entertainers in 2004 (Fujimoto, 2006). There was a considerable number of *Japayukis* (Japan-bound) entertainers in the 1980s that it became common for any Filipino going to Japan to be thought of as a Japayuki. Although this term has a derogatory meaning, most Japayukis are seeking greener pastures to financially provide for their loved ones due to the scarcity of opportunities back home. However, I also argue that while the term usually pertains to cisgender women, transgender women Japayukis exist and they have their reasons for relocating.

Looking into transgender women entertainers in Japan, Mitsuhashi (2005) described in depth the history and development of transgender entertainment in Japan based on her accounts as a transgender entertainer and academic. Transgender women performers started in floor shows in the mid-1950s, gay bars in the early 1970s, pubs in the 1980s, and finally, as transgender talents in modern Japanese media. The term *pub* in Japan refers to drinking bars with entertainment by hosts or hostesses. Although Mitsuhashi discussed transgender women entertainers, she did not mention Filipino transgender entertainers, who played a significant role in the industry during the golden age of foreign entertainers in the 1980s. Thus, this study aims to identify the gap and implications of an understudied group of Filipino transgender laborers whose gender identity and entertainment work present a different migrant trajectory.

Intersectional framing

The concept of intersectionality, rooted in Black feminist activism and scholarship, (Crenshaw, 1989), recognizes the intersection of social identities such as race and gender experienced by the individual selves in power relations among groups that form these categories (Shields, 2008). Creating an intersectional lens includes framing models based on multiplying social categories such as class, ethnicity, and sexuality as the most salient theme. While scholars commonly discuss these social positions, the experiences of shifting inequality among transgender people are varied due to other social categories. Hence, De Vries (2015) theorized a multifaceted prism to expand these intersectional models centering on transgender people of color. Based on 12 categories (race, gender, sexuality, class, nationality, ability, language, religion, culture, ethnicity, body size, and age), De Vries conceptualized a new intersectional model, which demonstrates how trans people of color experience multidimensional aspects of identity and inequality. Following De Vries' intersectional model contributes to the hypothesis that individuals belonging to multiple subordinate-group identities do not fit the prototypes of identity groups and will experience "intersectional invisibility," which is another alternative intersectional model developed by Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008) based on historical narratives, cultural representations, interest-group politics, and anti-discrimination legal frameworks.

The migration of transpinay entertainers is both a queer migration phenomenon and a Filipino labor migration phenomenon. A lack of recognition in scholarship indicates the link

Table 1. Participant demographics.

Pseudonym	Age (at the time of interview) Educational attainment or occupation	Period of entertainment work in Japan	Migration Status
Aiko	Late 30's; entered university but did not graduate	1990s-early 2000s	Return migrant
Akie	Mid 40's; university graduate	1990s-2000s	Japanese resident
Ami	Early 40's	1980s	Return migrant
Ayane	Mid 40's; entered university but did not graduate	1990s-2000s	Japanese resident
Eri	Early 50's; elementary	1980s	Japanese resident
Fumi	Mid 40's; post-graduate	1980s	Return migrant
Kana	Early 40's; dancer & choreographer	1990s-2000s	Return migrant
Kaori	Late 30's; university	2000s	Return migrant
Keiko	Mid 40's; university	1990s-early 2000s	Return migrant
Meru	Mid 40's; university	1990s-early 2000s	Return migrant
Mirai	Late 40's; university	1980s-2000s	Japanese resident
Reina	Late 30's; secondary	1980s-1990s	Return migrant
Ruri	Early 50; university	1980s	Return migrant
Yoshiko	Early 40's; dancer & choreographer	1990s-2000s	Return migrant

between migration, gender affirmation, and intersectionality. Taking into consideration the multiple social identities and migration stages of the transpinay entertainers, I draw on the conceptual framework of intersectional invisibility as well as De Vries' intersectional model to analyze my data.

Methods

This study draws on a qualitative approach using grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser &. Strauss, 1967) to systematically gather and organize data between 2012 and 2018 through participant observations and fourteen semi-structured interviews that revolved around my participants' background, gender identity, visa and job application process, work, relationships, and aspirations before, during, and after migration. Through snowball sampling and ties with the LGBTQ community, I was able to gain access to three transgender performances and was introduced to nine transpinays in Manila, one in Cebu and four in Japan. My background as a Filipino-Japanese descendant, born and raised in Manila, and positionality as a cisgender woman researcher based in Tokyo, as well as my relationship with the LGBTQ community, helped me build a rapport with my respondents as they tried to relate their migration to mine. The major data source is audio-recorded interviews from 60 to 90 minutes in length, code switched from Japanese to *Taglish* (mix of Tagalog or Filipino and English). The interview location was selected by each participant, and a signed consent form or an oral- informed consent was obtained. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and then translated into English and analyzed based on grounded theory principles.

Only two of the 14 interviews had follow-up interviews, while the rest were interviewed only once due to lost contact. I discussed the findings with these two respondents as a way of validating my interpretation. Either visa status or gender confirmation surgery was among their reasons to turn down follow-up interviews and protect their identities. Most respondents shared their narratives without revealing their real names. All informants' names in this article are Japanese pseudonyms to keep confidentiality.

Participants

The transgender entertainers ranged in age from 30 s to 50 s at the time of the interview. Nearly all attended university or graduated with a bachelor's degree with limited work and overseas travel experience before relocating to Japan. They are from lower-middle or middle social classes in Manila or the Visayan region. Almost all indicated that they were aware of their sexual orientation and gender identity as early as the age of six or seven and reported to have felt same-sex attraction during puberty. Several of them practice their Catholic faith or belong to other Christian denominations. Table 1 displays the participants' demographics.

Respondents were aware of the trans women terms in Japanese—*okama* (also refers to gay men) and *nyū-hāfu* (new half)—but preferred to interchangeably use expressions such as *bakla, bading* (gay man in Filipino), *babae* (woman in Filipino language), *transpinay*, transgender, and

trans to refer to themselves. Perhaps they were familiar with Anglophone gender terms but had limited knowledge of their meanings. Due to the overlap of Filipino, Japanese, Anglophone definitions, and slippages on how to use these gender terminologies, I propose the term *transpinay* as it is already used within the Filipino LGBTQ community to refer to the Filipino transnational transgender women in my study. The Society of Transsexual Women of the Philippines (STRAP) coined this term (Alegre, 2018) in the mid-2000s, which I adapt to a different context. In the term, *trans*, which originally signifies transgender or transsexual, becomes transmigrant and transnational transgender, while *pinay* is a Tagalog word, which means "Filipino woman."

Results and discussion

Since the findings are based on qualitative research and several major themes emerged from the interviews that are coded and linked to concepts (Weiss, 1994), the results and discussion in this study are combined. Participants' quotes are presented in this section, and a collection of perceptions regarding gender identity, performance, and mobility is developed in the course of their narratives. I categorize these into three stages: pre-migration, migration, and return migration. I illustrate how the purposes of their transnational migration to Japan are compounded and how these help them affirm their gender identity or expression.

Pre-migration

In the first part of this pre-migration phase, I explain the transpinay entertainers' various reasons for their relocation to Japan. The latter section demonstrates how recruitment and passing the auditions are fundamental to obtain the entertainer's visa and set the course for the transpinay's gender affirmation.

Reasons for migration

The reasons for migration are economic and non-economic. The transpinay entertainers migrate to Japan is not solely for economic reasons; they also seek sexual emancipation. Given that sexual emancipation happens within a context in which sexuality itself is socially constructed (Schneider, 2005) and when sexuality is one of the motives for transnational migration (Hirano, 2014), transnational mobility enables representations of queer subjectivities and practices (Manalansan, 2006). While the literature highlights that the reason for sexual migration stems from sexuality, the intersectional model (De Vries, 2015) of social identities such as class, ability, and age is apparent due to the diverse backgrounds of the transpinay entertainers. This is demonstrated in the narration of Ruri, a return migrant in her 50 s, who compared her generation to the younger generation of entertainers based on class and ability:

> *"If our country is as rich as Japan or the US, we won't go abroad. But for me, that's not the reason. That doesn't mean that we were rich, but we had enough money to live. I was taken as an entertainer and explored what I hadn't seen before. I was a pioneer because I went to Japan in the 1980s. Those were the times many Filipinos with education went to Japan. They just wanted to travel abroad. I was 21, newly graduated from college".*

Because she comes from the middle class, Ruri's motivations for migrating are in sharp contrast to several transpinay entertainers in the 1990s and 2000s, who were breadwinners and who were attracted to work in Japan primarily for economic reasons. Others were drawn to Japan because of its geographical proximity to the Philippines, and its rich cultural heritage fascinated them. However, the most apparent reason for their migration was the lack of employment for Filipino transgender women during the 1980s and 1990s.

> *"I did not see myself working in the Philippines, because at that time, there were no professional jobs for transgender people."*

Fumi was a university graduate in the 1980s when her trans women friends encouraged her to join them in Japan. She realized that the job was temporary, so she returned to the Philippines and pursued graduate studies that led her to have an academic career in the 2000s.

Jobs for Filipino transgender people were limited to the service and entertainment industries in the 1980s. Several Filipinos working in drag

performances hoped to pass as women, and when they were seen cross-dressing in public, they would get ridiculed and discriminated against. Transpinay entertainers, who studied economics, engineering, social sciences and design, aspired to use their skills and talents but could not get accepted at work if they cross-dress or become full-time transgender women. Therefore, the desire to live as a full-time transgender woman constrained them from embarking on a career path of their choice. They had to select between their career and gender identity. During the pre-migration, the transpinays chose to work as entertainers in Japan, so that they could have a lifestyle of a full-time transgender woman. For several transpinays, an aspect of becoming a full-time transgender woman was to consider gender confirmation surgery and Ayane described how Japan, during the mid-80s until the mid-90s, was known for lucrative ways to make money and save for the surgery:

> *"After the show, we were called by the customers to their tables. Sometimes, as soon as we sat down, they gave us ten thousands of yen (around 900 US dollars). It was like raining money. For us transgender, our salary and the tip made it possible for us to have the surgery."*

In the end, the narratives reveal that aside from economic reasons, several trans women relocated to Japan for social mobility and gender confirmation surgery.

Passing the audition and obtaining the visa

Similar to Filipino hostesses, the exodus of Filipino transgender women entertainers to Japan peaked during the economic bubble from 1985 until the early 1990s. Anyone interested in becoming an entertainer had to go through training and auditions handled by the promotion agency's talent manager in the Philippines. During the 1990s, the entertainers who went to Japan were required to get an Artist Record Book (ARB), which allowed them to go back and forth to Japan. If the applicant passed the audition, the applicant could apply for a three-month or six-month entertainer's visa depending on the work contract.

Akie considers herself a late bloomer who started to dress up as a woman during the training to pass the auditions. On the audition day, she felt so nervous she forgot she was dressed as a woman until she and the other auditionees were asked to remove their makeup so that the Japanese recruiters could see how they looked like without it.

> *Interviewer: Did you dress up as a woman for the auditions?*
>
> *Akie: Yes.*
>
> *Interviewer: How did you feel dressing up as a woman?*
>
> *Akie: I didn't think of it. I was feeling so nervous because I was being gazed at by the Japanese.*

Akie was aware that if she qualified, she had to give half of her first salary to the promotion agency ran by Filipinos who informed her of other auditions held by the Japanese recruiters. The initial stage of Akie's and other transpinay entertainers' migration experience was to pass an audition in order to obtain an entertainers' visa. Passing as a woman based on facial features is the most significant clear-cut test that they have to undergo while having skills in choreography was simply considered as a secondary advantage. Drawing on the concept of intersectional invisibility (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008) and the intersection model, Akie has to play various personas to be acknowledged as a professional entertainer, be accepted as a woman, and be granted a visa to become a labor migrant. Her ability, gender, and nationality are the social categories that she has to balance in order to finally go to Japan.

The audition procedures, including a Pre-departure Showcase (PDS) for the Philippine Overseas Employment Association (POEA) officials, have changed in the past two decades. Yet, the main criteria remained for a trans woman to be accepted as an entertainer: an attractive physical appearance that could "pass" for or resemble a woman. How could they pass as women and to whose standards? Brubaker (2016) defines gender passing under the term transgender. Due to the minority status of transgender people, the need for gender affirmation may take on a vital role as a confirmation of their sense of self being seen for who they are and how they prefer to be treated (Sevelius, 2013). For several trans women, passing in this sense, means being perceived as a non-trans woman. Most transpinays, however,

pointed out that regardless of gender confirmation surgery, passing the auditions meant resembling a beautiful woman of mixed race and exotic looks, or a petite Japanese woman with fair skin who is appealing for Japanese. The transpinays' physical characteristics had to be on par with the recruiters' standards corresponded to the marketability of a transgender show in Japan. It is also evident that what is seen as physically attractive encourages diversity in Japanese beauty perceptions (Miller, 2006). Although the transpinay entertainers' faces and bodies may appear to be commodified and objectified as women, trans women, or Filipinos, this strikes as a sense of empowerment for them. For example, Ruri described how Filipino transgender entertainers were appreciated not only for physical appearance but also for their ability to perform:

> *"We were just happy because we had a promoter who wanted us to perform. They (promoter) recognized us Filipino entertainers as highly talented people. Whether we were trans or not, the important thing was to have a show."*

Although this verdict on passing as a beautiful woman and entertainer may be affirming and empowering, it also highlights that the transpinays' gender practices were determined and policed. In other words, I argue that for those who do not pass the auditions, the process becomes a highly gender policing practice that favors those who performed their gender. This becomes critical for transgender women who could not pass because it could lead to body comparison, disempowerment, and disconfirmation of their own gender identity and ability as a performer. Gender affirmation framework related to transgender women of color integrates objectification theory in which the concept of self is objectified (Sevelius, 2013) and, in the case of transpinays, they are judged based on Japanese standards of beauty.

The gender expressions and practices of transpinays influence their chance to pass the auditions and get a visa. Change of gender identity is illegal in the Philippines, so transpinay entertainers apply as male for the entertainer visa even if the job they are applying for requires them to be a woman. They negotiate and maneuver their several intersecting identities, which they gradually learn to perform over time as a transgender entertainer and migrant.

Migration: entertainment work and performing gender

The transpinays worked full-time as entertainers at clubs in small and major cities such as Tokyo, Saitama, Nagoya, and Fukuoka. The process of recruitment and obtaining a visa is a reminder of labor migration through intermediaries (Agunias, 2009) when the transpinay entertainers are outsourced as migrant laborers. As soon as they arrived in Japan with a very limited Japanese communication capability, they started working in pubs. The *mama san* (club manager) or the *senpai* (a colleague with longer work experience) had them rehearsed for the shows and taught them how to serve the customers.

The transpinays describe what activities they engage in to impress their customers. Yoshiko and Kana explain that their audience, who are mostly men of various economic and social backgrounds, recognize them for being transpinays as well as rave about their performance as *fushigi* (strange), *omoshiroii* (interesting), and *mezurashii* (rare). The business hours are usually from 9:00 in the evening until 4:00 the next morning. Shows begin late in the evening for about 15 to 40 minutes. The attractive trans women in colorful and flamboyant costumes walk across the stage with effortless grace. They exhibit their talents in Japanese traditional and modern dance, lip-sync of Japanese or Western songs, occasionally comical skits, and Filipino cultural dances.

After the performance, the entertainers socialize while they serve their clients. The entertainers do not need to drink but can receive incentives if they encourage clients to order more beverages. Although there was no written agreement between the entertainers and club manager to prohibit dating customers, my informants revealed that they occasionally met customers outside the club as long as there was mutual attraction and the clients continued visiting the club. Having a serious romantic relationship with the customers was discouraged as it was seen as bad for business. Parreñas (2011) notes that there is a false

assumption that hostess work leads to prostitution, and this also seems to be the case for my respondents. Emotional labor (Hochschild, 2003) is mainly part of the entertainers' job to care for, flirt with, and entertain their customers. The four universal factors of a hostess club are: the hostess must be or act like a woman; the hostess must treat that customer as superior; the service, while alluding sex, cannot proceed to genital penetration or oral sex; and the service is conducted primarily at the level of conversation (Allison, 1994). Based on my interviews, these characteristics of a hostess club also hold true for a transgender club.

Based on Mirai's long experience working at various clubs, it seems that besides attractiveness and youthfulness, social skills are crucial in satisfying customers who are mostly single or married men aged from 20s to 60s. Entrance fees excluding drinks range from 23 to 200 US dollars. A club's clients and the amount an entertainer can earn depend on the club's location. Furthermore, transpinay entertainers receive gratuity and expensive presents from their Japanese clients who recognize and appreciate them for performing their sexuality. Fumi, an entertainer in the 1980s and a return migrant, expounded this:

> *"My feeling was, we were able to articulate our gender identity. In the first place, we were hired as transgender entertainers. The greatest compliment from a Japanese is they pay you for looking like a Japanese and looking like a woman."*

Fumi's statement shows how intersectionality plays out. In the Philippines, they could not get a professional job as a transgender woman yet in Japan, they are valued for looking like a woman and a Japanese, two identities by which would be a challenge to pass in their home country during the 1980s and 1990s. This example underlies how intersectionality is relational in gender and race.

It is worth mentioning that there are clubs with cisgender Filipino women only, transgender women entertainers only, and a combination of the two with other nationalities. For those transpinays who have experienced working in mixed clubs, they performed comical skits, which were quite common among transgender entertainers. They appeared to be as popular as cisgender Filipino women entertainers and, in some cases, even more well-received. Reina, who had worked in various clubs, stated:

> *"Sometimes there were customers who preferred transgender women. They thought we were omoshiroii (interesting), so I was asked to join their table after the show. I like working with Filipinos at the clubs because I could sense the others (non-Filipinos) were insecure."*

Intersectional invisibility is apparent in Reina's experience working with other entertainers. Aside from feeling othered because of her gender identity, Reina also feels othered because of her race when she worked with non-Filipinos. However, this is perhaps a result of her limited work experience with non-Filipinos.

Based on their narratives and my participant observations, the transpinay entertainers' performance onstage exhibits their skills honed through hard work and rigorous rehearsals. Moreover, their entertainer profile as a Filipino transgender woman is a unique selling point and may not have to be interpreted as a sexual tease but rather as an embodiment of gendered performances and ethnicity. In other words, their intersecting identities—being a Filipino, a transgender woman, a transpinay who looks and acts like a Japanese or a mixed race, and a migrant entertainer—can be perceived as exotic, which, in turn, helps them market their services in Japan.

A common discourse on gender performance is how cultural reality and identities influence the accomplishment of construction, deconstruction, or reconstruction of performing gender. Lunsing (2003) defines gender as a set of constructions determined by culture, time, and place. Therefore, it varies from culture to culture and can change. For Goffman (1977), the "arrangement between the sexes" is a cultural matter. Butler (1990) theorizes "performing gender as a stylized repetition of acts" and that our bodies enact the dominant conventions of gender. West and Zimmerman (1987) explain, "doing gender which means creating differences between girls and boys and women and men, differences that are not natural, essential, or biological. Once the differences have been constructed, they are used to reinforce the "essentialness" of gender" (p. 137).

Examining transgender performances suggests that gender may be perceived as fluid and ambivalent in

Japanese society, where there is a slim distinction between masculinity and femininity that borders on androgyny. Robertson (1998) points out gender ambivalence in Japan while Lunsing (2003) describes men who have transgressed the socially constructed boundaries of masculinity manifested in their Japanese theater traditions. Therefore, cross-dressing then is not always seen as an alternative manifestation of oneself to show that one is sexually and/or romantically interested in one's sex. On the other hand, considering the Philippines' historical background of Spanish and American colonialism, I concur with Garcia (2009) that Filipino masculinity is similar to how masculinity is perceived in Western societies emphasizing that even though the Western terms homosexuality and heterosexuality are being used by Filipinos to refer to their form of eroticism, these labels remain colonial, and cannot properly represent the core of the Filipinos' concept of sex or even their sexual self-understandings. Thus, the transpinays' efforts to perform both their masculinity and/or femininity try to blend in Japanese society that can be interpreted as self-empowering and gender-affirming. This was articulated by Akie when she described her relationship with her heterosexual Japanese male partner:

> *"We understand (men), you know, unlike women who expect men to be always strong. We have the heart of a woman and a heart of a man. That's why we understand them (men)."*

As they exhibit feminine traits on stage, they may behave otherwise in their personal lives. Could this mean they are still "performing" their gender? Whether the transpinays may (or may not) reveal their biological sex and transition, they subconsciously perform their gender preference (Okada, 2013). Hence, doing (West & Zimmerman, 1987) or undoing (Butler, 2004; Deutsch, 2007) gender is woven into their livable lives with their intersecting subordinate identities as a Filipino transgender woman and migrant worker relegating them to a position of intersectional invisibility.

Return migration: transnationalism and social remittances

'Should I stay, or should I go?' is a crucial question a transpinay is faced with whenever the three or six-month entertainer visa expires. An increase in the number of overstayers and the misconceptions that entertainers' nature of work is similar to prostitutes led the Japanese immigration to restrict the issuance of entertainer's visas in the mid-2000s. Transpinays either renewed their contract to work in Japan several times, potentially spanning an average of 15 years, or became a *bilog* (Filipino overstayer in Japan). An informant reported that there were hundreds of clubs and around a thousand transpinay entertainers in the last three decades. It would be unlikely to track the number of transpinays with entertainer's visas because there was no record of contract, visa renewal, and names of those who changed their gender identity. Those transpinays who decided to stay, either found a cisgender Japanese woman to get married to or remained undocumented.

Transpinay entertainers returned several times or chose to stay in Japan even after they lost their legal status because they were marginalized in their home country. Keiko, an entertainer during the 1980s and 1990s, and a return migrant stated, "the Japanese really treat us well with respect and admiration compared to here (the Philippines)." Although the Philippines may appear to be a gay-friendly society, Filipinos "were unfavorably disposed toward the transgendered" (Winter et al., 2007, p.79). Keiko believes that Filipinos are still unaware of what trans people go through. Her migration experience affirmed her gender and inspired her to form an organization for Filipino transgender people when she returned to the Philippines. Thus, reinforcing Connell's and Pearse's (2014) notion that trans people are becoming activists for the trans community. Aside from her active participation in international conferences to represent the Filipino trans community, Keiko manages a call center company, where many trans people are employed.

Fumi, an entertainer in the 1980s and a return migrant, considered Japan a paradise. Reina, another return migrant said, "I would be happy to go back to Japan because it is my second country." Entertainment work in Japan in the 1980s and 1990s provided the transpinays with an economic and symbolic capital that was perceived as inspiring for Filipino trans women.

Their entertainment work facilitated flows of social remittances in the Philippines in the form of social capital, performing skills, ideas and styles that transgender returnees were able to pass onto younger, aspiring performers. This suggests that the transpinays' migration experience should not be bounded as a singular mobility, identity, or spatiality (Cotton, 2012).

Many transpinays had two decades of migration experience and entertainment work due to multiple visa renewals or overstaying. Entertainers during the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s revealed how their migrant trajectories evolved due to their aspirations shaped by the situation of transgender lives in the Philippines. In the 1980s, a massive number of transpinay entertainers emerged, who were mostly from the middle class. These had stronger ties among transpinays even after their contracts ended. However, several narratives indicated that relationships in the succeeding decades seemed hostile due to rivalries stemming from love affairs with clients and favoritism in the workplace. A few narratives revealed that due to misguidance and lack of self-management, reports of suicide, drug addiction, and unprecedented change of identities and personalities were disclosed. Mental health issues were also evident among these understudied migrant workers who did not have access to healthcare.

Whether the transpinay entertainers returned to the Philippines or migrated to another foreign country, they reinvented themselves. Several of them continued to pursue a career in the entertainment business as choreographers, some worked as hairstylists or makeup artists, others started their own business, pursued graduate school, became a civil servant, worked in call centers, became LGBTQ activists or educators among others. Whatever they chose to do, they nurtured the values they learned from living in Japan as "social remittances": discipline, good manners, *gambaru* (trying one's best), keeping professionalism and excellence, being punctual, and maintaining cleanliness and orderliness. Hence, they take pride in their "reappearance" in the Philippines (Okada, 2013). Since these *balikbayans* (Filipino return migrants) learned to adapt to changes in developed countries, they appeared to express social responsibility despite the difficulty adjusting to life back in the Philippines.

Conclusion

The 14 narratives I have collected represent only a few stories from more than a thousand transpinay entertainers in Japan in the last three decades. However, these 14 narratives provide insight into the transpinay migrants' lives, which follow migration trajectories somewhat similar to cisgender women entertainers in Japan. Tracing their journey, I have shown that their migration patterns manifest an attachment to Japan as long as they sustain their transnational activities. They see Japan as a land of promise and a safe space, where they can blend in and express their gender identity. Their migration experience indicates a positive outcome in their gender affirmation that does not necessarily lead to gender confirmation surgery. They continue to negotiate and perform their gender depending on the circumstances they are in, whether they are migrants or return migrants with or without transitioning.

Considering the multiple social identities and migration stages of the transpinay entertainers, I have applied the conceptual framework of intersectional invisibility as well as De Vries' intersectional model. The transpinay entertainers provide a significant case for highlighting the temporal aspect of their gender performance and migration experience, in which their commitment toward entertainment work transforms over time. Before moving to Japan, they negotiate their gender identity to pass the auditions and apply for an entertainment visa. During their migration, doing and undoing gender is woven into their lives with their intersecting subordinate identities as a Filipino transgender woman and a migrant worker, resulting into an intersectional invisibility. For a transpinay who overstayed or became untraceable, coming out as a trans woman becomes as daunting as revealing their legal status, while the transpinay return migrants adjust to Philippine society with social remittances. The transpinays interviewed for this study may have affirmed their gender identity yet may have disconfirmed those who could not pass the auditions, which is one of the limitations of this

study. Nevertheless, the transpinay entertainers' transnational migrant trajectories shape their gender identity and expressions, which influence the transformation of the Philippine LGBTQ landscape as they become more visible. While this study contributes to transgender and migration studies, it poses another crucial issue that further research on Filipino transgender women, particularly health care, needs to be addressed.

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